

CREATURE STORIES FROM THE FIFE FOLKLORE ARCHIVES,
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CHAD ARMENT

Some time back, after the television show *Finding Bigfoot* visited Utah, a newspaper article quoted Dr. Lynne McNeill, a Utah State University professor who teaches folklore, regarding a number of Bigfoot stories in the university's Fife Folklore Archives. The archives hold a large collection of folklore-related studies and interviews, and there are several items of cryptozoological interest, particularly regarding Sasquatch and the Bear Lake Monster.

As I noted in *Cryptozoology: Science & Speculation*, all cryptids are folkloric. They are ethnoknown, in that people report seeing them, even if they have not been determined to have a true biological reality (and if they do exist, whether they are mistaken accounts of known species or are as yet unidentified). But, there are differences between folklore studies and cryptozoology. In folklore studies, the "truth" behind the legend is not as important as in simply collecting the story, and analyzing patterns of story telling or how such stories spread. Cryptozoology has a specific purpose—to determine whether there is an unknown creature behind such stories, and to find physical confirmative evidence of such.

Still, there is overlap, as part of the cryptozoological methodology is to collect folkloric accounts (e.g. eyewitness sightings, etc.), and there probably is something to be learned on both sides. Some differences are more apparent than others. For example, in interviewing witnesses, a folklorist overlooks many basic questions that a cryptozoology researcher would ask (or should ask) about habitat, environmental conditions, morphological details, and

more. A folklorist may not be familiar enough with native wildlife to be able to recognize red flags or characteristics that point to known species or natural phenomena. And, of course, folklorists put as much effort in collecting obvious tall tales and campfire stories as they do on first-person sightings. On the other hand, I've seen many cryptozoology enthusiasts write about mystery animal stories they've collected without any awareness of common folkloric elements that might warrant careful evaluation.

In any case, folklore archives may provide a good starting point for determining regions worth a closer cryptozoological look. Here I present some stories from the Fife Folklore Archives. I've tried to stick to direct eyewitness stories (and occasional second-hand stories), rather than including generic "campfire" monster tales and the like. Per archive regulations, I am not reprinting witness statements, so I will simply summarize stories with brief descriptions. Many of these stories were for class projects, where the student either interviewed someone or related a personal story. My appreciation goes to Dr. Lynne McNeill and archives curator Randy Williams and staff.

BIGFOOT

Rumors of Bigfoot (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 10, Folder 11, Item 2.2.2.10.5)

INFORMANT: William Draper

DATE: July 1972

STORY COLLECTED: October 1981

LOCATION: Providence Canyon

William and four friends (all 18 years old) were camping in Providence Canyon. One night they heard something rummaging through their food and gear. Looking out, they saw red eyes. When things got quiet, they started looking around (armed with rifles and knives), and William saw a "big hairy critter, standing upright

on two legs” nearby. It watched for a minute, then dropped to all fours and ran off up the mountain. “Size 15” tracks were found the next morning. Others in the area believed in the “Providence Monsters.”

Untitled (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 14, Item 2.5.4.1.6)

INFORMANT: H. F. Jackson

DATE: Summer 1970

STORY COLLECTED: Summer 1970

LOCATION: North Fork, Salmon River (northern Idaho)

Jackson was fishing with others when they heard noises (rustling) behind them. They thought it was probably a bear, so quietly investigated. Three “ape-men” ran, but they “got a good look at them.” The creatures were six feet in height, about 450-500 pounds each. They ran upright and “made grunting noises.”

A Summer with Bigfoot (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 14, Item 2.5.4.1.7)

INFORMANT: Collected received information from unidentified witness (television repairman)

DATE: “15 or 20 years ago”

STORY COLLECTED: July 1984

LOCATION: Unknown

Witness was an ex-logger living in Camas, UT. While at a logging camp, he and other loggers heard a strange noise that scared the camp dog. The horses also became very nervous. A “real rotten kinda smell” was noticed. For three months that summer, whatever it was stayed in the area. Years later, the witness watched a television documentary about Bigfoot, and recognized a scream on the show as the one he had heard before.

The Scream of Sasquatch (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 14, Item 2.5.4.1.8)

INFORMANT: Alan Pitt

DATE: Unknown

STORY COLLECTED: July 1984

LOCATION: Unknown

Pitt had been logging “about 12 miles even from the nearest dirt road that intersected the logging road we were on.” After eating lunch, he and a friend were heading back in the woods when they heard a noise about a hundred yards away. It started as a “low growl that rose in pitch almost to a scream.” The sound repeated a few times, so they decided to head back to the truck and go home. They made sure to carry rifles the rest of the time they were in the area.

Close Encounter of the Worst Kind—Bigfoot (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 14, Item 2.5.4.1.14)

INFORMANT: Robert Bates, Jr.

DATE: Fall 1977

STORY COLLECTED: January 1987 (personal story)

LOCATION: Mountain near Elbe, Washington

Bates was serving in the Army, based in Ft. Lewis. On a weekend hunt with a couple of friends, they set up near a slope by a river and waited for a bull elk. Hearing what sounded like a large bull elk in the brush, they looked for a shot, but as the creature stepped out of the woods they saw a “Big-foot.” The sight of the creature “was enough to make use turn and run as fast as we could run.” One friend dropped his rifle. After several hours they cautiously returned to find it, and discovered that its stock was shattered and the barrel was bent. Nearby they found large human-like footprints. After reaching a pay phone, they contacted the Sheriff’s department. A skeptical deputy returned with them to the area, and changed his mind. They later spoke with Bigfoot researchers out of Portland, and passed a polygraph test.

Bigfoot and the U.S. Army (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 14, Item 2.5.4.1.16)

INFORMANT: Robert Bates, Jr.

DATE: Fall 1980

STORY COLLECTED: January 1987 (personal story)

LOCATION: Ft. Lewis, Washington

Bates was part of a platoon assigned to act as an aggressor force against a Signal Unit setting up in a remote eastern wooded area of Ft. Lewis. On the fourth night of operations, his squad discovered that the Signal Unit was without power and there were no signs of activity, so they checked in on them. The Signal Unit leader showed them that the generator trailer had been overturned and other equipment damaged. The Unit had been in the Commo Van, and had stayed in the van while it was being rocked back and forth. They didn't leave the van until the squad had showed up. Due to the damage, military investigators were called in, who, after looking into it for several days, cleared anyone of wrong-doing—Bates said his men were told to “keep our mouths shut about it.” After talking to a Signal Unit sergeant, he learned that investigators had found the area covered in bare human footprints, “about twice the size of any that the Army even thought about making boots for!”

Bigfoot (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 14, Item 2.5.4.1.23)

INFORMANT: Jim Burmester

DATE: 1984

STORY COLLECTED: 1986

LOCATION: Cherry Creek Road, Downey, ID

Jim and a date met up with friends for a campfire in a canyon. They heard a high pitched scream, then heard it again as it came closer. They all took off in their cars. As they drove out of the canyon on Cherry Creek Road, they saw a “huge black-haired creature” cross the road ahead of them.

Bigfoot in Blackfoot (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 14,
Item 2.5.4.1.30)

INFORMANT: Brenda Heslop

DATE: 1950s or 1960s

STORY COLLECTED: 2002

LOCATION: American Falls Reservoir, Idaho

This happened to Brenda's great uncle, and is a family story told at campfires. While camping in late fall, the door of their small camper opened one night and a "big, big hairy arm" came in. They hit it with a frying pan, and the creature cried out. It ran away, but its smell remained. They locked up and huddled inside all night. They found some long reddish hair on a barbwire fence nearby. Some of the family treats it as a joke, that it probably was a bear, while others are more serious about it.

Bigfoot Encounter (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 14,
Item 2.5.4.1.33)

INFORMANT: Sandy Bosgieter

DATE: early 1960s

STORY COLLECTED: 1990

LOCATION: North Ogden Canyon, Utah

While in high school, Bosgieter exercised horses for extra money. While riding one summer, she went up North Ogden Canyon, then went up a box canyon called Right Hand Canyon. She heard a strange scream, and decided to turn around just to be safe. While heading back, she found 3- to 4-inch diameter limbs broken off on the pass, too large for horses to break at a walking pace. She also smelled something foul. Leaving the canyon, she heard the scream again.

Bigfoot Story (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 14, Item
2.5.4.1.34)

INFORMANT: John Weaver

DATE: Summer 1982
STORY COLLECTED: 1990 (personal story)
LOCATION: Oxford Peak, Idaho

After spending the day exploring trails with a friend, they stopped on a bluff to watch the sunset. They smelled what they thought was a dead animal, then saw a “brown, man-like shape in the trees,” prompting their immediate departure.

The Maybe Bigfoot Story (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 14, Item 2.5.4.1.39)
INFORMANT: Kit Sheldon Kinsel
DATE: Unknown
STORY COLLECTED: 2000
LOCATION: East side of the Washington peninsula

While flying low over a ridge as an air observer on smoke patrol, Kinsel saw a large black creature that he assumed was a bear, but didn't seem to be running on all fours. It didn't lope, but was moving “very fast on two feet down the ridge.” He told the pilot and they swung around, but didn't see it again. [The archives has the same story, about the same witness and written by the same student, but collected in 1997 (probably written for a different class), which has a few differences, though the main details are similar.]

Sighting of Bigfoot (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 14, Item 2.5.4.1.43)
INFORMANT: E. Kent Williams
DATE: 1960
STORY COLLECTED: 1997
LOCATION: Near Bluebell, Utah (?)

Williams and a friend were spotlighting and hunting jackrabbits after sunset. While driving along, they saw something unusual in

the spotlight and stopped. It looked like a “round gray object” but then stood up into a manlike figure about seven feet tall and three feet wide. Unlike other animals they had seen at night, its eyes had no shine in the spotlight. Williams put the gun on it, but couldn’t bring himself to pull the trigger. A few months later he saw a report on the news about a Bigfoot sighting, and recognized it as being similar to what they had seen.

THE BEAR LAKE MONSTER

The typical Bear Lake Monster story is simply a campfire tale. Those that attempt to give early details on the monster relate that in the early days, ranchers would send their cattle or horses through the narrows, or over the frozen ice, and an occasional animal would be disappear, sometimes along with the brief appearance of a large scaly object. One frequent feature in the stories is the belief that Bear Lake is bottomless and that it somehow connects to Loch Ness. Supposedly, Bear Lake’s Bonneville cisco (a whitefish) is only found there and in Loch Ness. (There is, of course, no truth to that; it is a Bear Lake endemic.) Another common origin story involves *Deseret News* correspondent Joseph C. Rich creating the Bear Lake monster myth as a way to stir up excitement. Only a few of the collected stories involve first person (or even second person) sightings.

Bear Lake Monster (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 16, Item 2.5.5.10.62)

INFORMANT: Milton Sealy

DATE: Unknown

STORY COLLECTED: 1995 (told in the 1980s)

LOCATION: Bear Lake

Sealy's father and a friend were fishing in a small boat. Finding a good spot close to shore, they stopped to get out on the bank. The friend went to step on what he thought was a log, but it swam away.

It wasn't fishlike, and was "green brown" in color. They tried to find it again, but it had disappeared.

Bear Lake Monster (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 16, Item 2.5.5.10.73)

INFORMANT: Ruth Bassett

DATE: Unknown

STORY COLLECTED: 1974

LOCATION: Bear Lake

Bassett's parents were vacationing near the lake, and while sitting on the shore saw a large object emerge slowly from the water partially onto the bank. It was as large as a piano and was dark brown in color. They weren't afraid, and watched it for some time. When her father went back to the car to grab his camera, shutting the door scared the creature off.

OTHER

There are a handful of stories of strange monsters (lizardman, sheepman, etc.) that are simply "scare your friend" inventions. There are a couple of "little people" stories that are interesting, though not all are from Utah or nearby regions, and most are simply folk tales.

The Elusive Little Men (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 13, Item 2.5.3.4.1)

INFORMANT: Val Snow

DATE: Unknown

STORY COLLECTED: 1971

LOCATION: Southern Utah wilderness

Informant was told the story on a BYU survival trip by two leaders, Max and Larry Smith. The Smiths were out hiking and found

small human like footprints in the sand. As they looked around, they saw a “little human” running over the rocks. He was about four feet high and was covered in red hair. They said that this “type of Indian” lives in remote areas (“dark underbrush in a rainforest type terrain”) and hardly ever come out, being “real primitive” and “real savage.” It’s not noted whether this was a camp fire story or seriously related.

Cheenans (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 13, Item 2.5.3.6.1)

INFORMANT: Karen Stamnes

DATE: Unknown

STORY COLLECTED: 1973

LOCATION: Near Gulfport, Mississippi

After visiting the Stamnes family, the collector and an Elder were told to “watch out for ‘the Cheenans.’” When asked what Cheenans [phonetic spelling] were, they were told that they were “little men, about one and one-half feet tall” that come out at night and create mischief. The backwoods folk have many stories about them.

The Promise of the Little People (Collection 08, Group 07, Box 12, Folder 13, Item 2.5.3.7.1)

INFORMANT: Roger Snow Trimnal (family story)

DATE: “About fifty years ago.”

STORY COLLECTED: Probably 1970s

LOCATION: Rock Hill, South Carolina

Roger’s great uncle was fourteen years old when he hiked into the woods near the river, looking for “the little people” (“Pigmy Indians”) whose tracks he had noticed. His parents found him the next morning sitting on a stump, confused and hysterical. He said that he had gotten tired, fallen asleep, and awoken to find the little people around him. They told him if he promised not to tell

anyone he had seen them, they would give him an all-powerful herb that cured illness. If he did tell about them, he would die. His parents took him home, and not long after, he died. Roger's grandfather had a similar story told to him by his grandmother (illustrating that though there were some changes as the story passed from one generation to the next, main details remained the same).